

launch sites or test ranges in the United States viable and competitive.

Mr. JEFFORDS. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate agree to the House amendment to the Senate amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHARTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENTS ACT OF 1997

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Labor Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2616, and the Senate then proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2616) to amend titles 6 and 10 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to improve and expand chartered schools.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the bill?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

AMENDMENT NO. 3795

(Purpose: To provide a manager's amendment)

Mr. JEFFORDS. Senator COATS has a substitute amendment at the desk, and I ask for its consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Vermont (Mr. JEFFORDS), for Mr. COATS, Mr. LIEBERMAN, Mr. D'AMATO, Mr. KERREY, Ms. LANDRIEU and Mr. MCCAIN, proposes an amendment numbered 3795.

(The text of the amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Amendments Submitted.")

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I strongly support the Charter School Expansion Act, and I commend Senator COATS for his leadership in bringing it before the Senate. The legislation builds on the current Charter School Program to ensure that these schools are given the greater flexibility that they have been promised, and to reaffirm that they must be accountable to the same high standards that we expect of all public schools.

In recent years, in response to the widespread movement to improve the quality of education in the nation's public schools, the innovative idea of charter schools began to develop broad bi-partisan support. Educators and community leaders took active parts in designing new schools that would receive public funds, like traditional public schools, but that would be free of many local regulations, and would also be held accountable for achieving the goals of their charter.

States have the primary role in defining the role of charter schools—34 states have now passed enabling legislation, and they vary widely in their applications of this innovative idea.

The Charter School Expansion Act continues to use Federal start-up grants as an incentive for local communities to design charter schools that provide significant options for parents within the public school system. The Act encourages the sharing of ideas and practices between charter schools and other public schools, so that schools benefit from the best lessons of each.

The pending legislation strengthens the accountability provisions for charter schools by giving funding preferences to states that review and evaluate the performance of their charter schools at least once every five years. Charter schools must continue to be open to all students. President Clinton has set a goal of having 3,000 charter schools in operation nationwide by the year 2002.

The Department of Education is conducting an ongoing study of charter school and the degree to which they are successful in improving student achievement. The results of that study will be very important in guiding the future of these schools.

The Charter School Expansion Act is an essential part of our overall effort to improve public schools, and I urge the Senate to approve it. We must continue to do all we can to ensure that all public schools get the support they need to provide every child a good education.

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the amendment be agreed to, the bill be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the bill appear in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 3795) was agreed to.

The bill (H.R. 2616), as amended, was passed.

NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION ACT

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 521, S. 1970.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1970) to require the Secretary of the Interior to establish a program to provide assistance in the conservation of neotropical migratory birds.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the immediate consideration of the bill?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill which had been reported from the Committee on Environment and Public Works, with amendments; as follows:

(The parts of the bill intended to be stricken are shown in boldface brackets and the parts of the bill intended to be inserted are shown in italic.)

S. 1970

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds that—

(1)(A) birds constitute one of the most widely recognized and appreciated components of North American wildlife;

(B) approximately 25,000,000 Americans travel to observe birds; and

(C) more than 60,000,000 adult Americans watch and feed birds at home;

(2) birds—

(A) are key indicators of environmental health;

(B) play important roles in plant pollination and seed dispersal;

(C) serve as critical links in the food web; and

(D) maintain the health of the environment.

(3)(A) healthy bird populations provide important economic benefits, such as control of noxious insects on agricultural crops, thereby preventing hundreds of millions of dollars in economic losses each year to farming and timber interests; and

(B) more than \$20,000,000,000 is spent in the United States each year on watching and feeding birds;

(4)(A) despite their irreplaceable value, many North American bird species, once considered common, are in decline;

(B) 90 North American bird species are listed as endangered or threatened in the United States;

(C) another 124 North American bird species are of high conservation concern; and

(D) Mexico's Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries lists approximately 390 bird species as being endangered, threatened, vulnerable, or rare;

(5)(A) of the nearly 800 bird species known to occur in the United States, approximately 500 migrate among nations;

(B) the large majority of those species, the neotropical migrants, winter in Latin America and the Caribbean; and

(C) neotropical migrants in particular have received much attention because of their population declines;

(6)(A) the primary reason for the declines is habitat loss and degradation (including pollution and contamination);

(B) because neotropical migrants range across numerous international borders each year, their conservation requires that safeguards be established at both ends of the migration routes, as well as at critical stopover areas along the way; and

(C) establishing such safeguards necessitates the joint commitment and effort of all nations that support those species, as well as all levels of society; [and]

(7)(A) numerous initiatives exist to conserve migratory birds, including *Partners in Flight*, the *Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network*, the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*, and *monitoring action plans and conservation plans for water birds, marsh birds, and raptors*; and

(B) those initiatives can be significantly strengthened and enhanced by coordination of their efforts to protect habitat shared by migratory birds; and

[(7)] (8) this Act constitutes an effort on the part of the United States to adopt appropriate measures for the protection of migratory birds in collaboration with—

(A) neighboring nations that are parties to the Convention Respecting Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere, done at the Pan American Union, Washington, October 12, 1940 (56 Stat. 1354); [and]

(B) States, conservation organizations, corporations and business interests, and other private entities[.]; and